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President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Natural disasters in the Central American States

The Acting President: Before turning to the item on our agenda this morning, may I, on behalf of the members of the Assembly and on my own behalf, extend to the Governments and the peoples of the Central American countries recently struck by a disastrous hurricane our deepest sympathy for the tragic loss of life and extensive material damage.

May I also express the hope that the international community will demonstrate its solidarity by responding promptly and generously to any request from those countries for assistance in their present plight.

Agenda item 168

Dialogue among civilizations

Draft resolution (A/53/L.23/Rev.1)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): The founders of our Organization enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations the common aspirations of the whole of humanity and, indeed, their determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in their lifetime had brought untold sorrow to mankind. They sought to do so by practising tolerance and living together in peace with one another as good neighbours, by promoting justice and respect for the rule of law and by reaffirming their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

As we the people of the United Nations look back and take stock of half a century of the Charter's existence, together with achievements — historic as they are — including the very establishment of this Organization, we see dark episodes of bigotry, exclusion, confrontation and bloodshed. With their extremely high toll of human lives and on the human spirit, such episodes have occurred in the era of the United Nations Charter, following two atrocious world wars which gave rise to a global commitment to arrest that trend. The last decade of the twentieth century has had more than its share of genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, challenging the very ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

But I submit to the Assembly that these are aberrations, not the norm. Indeed, the last decades of this millennium since the advent of the United Nations have

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been characterized by a universal desire to promote peace, tolerance and understanding and ensure social, economic and political development through international cooperation and solidarity. This in itself is an achievement of unparalleled proportions, as if the horror of all the wars of the past provided the background for the world community to embrace those Charter principles.

Certainly, such progress has not come easily, since old habits fade only after resistance and friction. It should thus come as no surprise that today, when the international community has a real and unique opportunity to break away from cold-war habits of domination and exclusion, ideas and theories are being put forward to institutionalize and even to sanctify and thus perpetuate the mentality associated with rivalries and conflicts of the past. They do so by elevating the confrontation between rival political and economic interests to the level of the irreconcilability of civilizations and of their inevitable clash.

It is evident that on the eve of the new millennium the world cannot afford to begin a new chapter in its life with such dangerous ideas, which give rise to intolerance and ignore the ever-growing web of interaction among nations in an increasingly interdependent world.

The revolution in communications, which has transformed the very concept of distance, provides us with a historic opportunity to enter the next century with a common resolve to minimize misunderstandings and misperceptions, utilizing the strengths of human diversity to face common challenges and advance common interests.

President Khatami's initiative to promote and facilitate dialogue among civilizations promises to provide a suitable framework for expanding the horizons for such constructive and enriching interaction among peoples of various origins and persuasions. Central to this framework is the premise that the diversity of humankind is and has always been a source of strength and not a reason for division. This would allow the process to encompass all nations and peoples regardless of their race, colour, creed or national origin. The international community has indicated its willingness to embrace this idea as it hopes to provide a fresh approach to a better tomorrow for humanity.

Violence is said to be the ultimate manifestation of inarticulateness. Dialogue among civilizations is thus a call stemming from the collective wisdom of man to avoid violence, in its broadest sense, through better articulation of differing ideas, visions and aspirations. The nature of such a dialogue is intellectual and cultural in essence. It postulates that the gift of diversity among people ought to be recognized and explored through interaction and communication. While managing the diversity among nations is likely to remain among the most challenging tasks confronting the international community, dialogue and interaction are indispensable for any accomplishment in this respect.

Great civilizations throughout human history have flourished through a collective process of endeavour and interaction of people and nations with diverse cultures and orientations. Various civilizations in the span of history and geography have contributed, in one way or another, to the progressive development of human society as a whole. They have learned from each other, have affected and influenced each other and at times have competed with each other. A close reading of human history would indicate that, notwithstanding formidable obstacles to constructive interaction among nations imposed by episodes and manifestations of intolerance and war, civilizations have always managed to benefit and thrive through communication and mutual enrichment, while preserving their individual identities. Thus, the achievements of different civilizations, constitute the collective heritage of mankind. By the same token, the benefits of interaction among civilizations have and will continue to be extended to all.

Given the fundamental role of culture in shaping political and economic structures, the promotion of dialogue among various cultures, on the basis of tolerance and respect for diversity, would result in the reduction of tensions and contribute to international peace and security. Dialogue by itself would not guarantee the eradication of the evils of war and bigotry. But it does provide a reasonable and sound paradigm to approach the global problems likely to confront us in the twenty-first century.

It is thus imperative that each and every member of the international community — Governments, the United Nations system, international and non-governmental organizations — take part in the process of promoting and facilitating dialogue among civilizations. This will require first and foremost the active engagement and participation of scholars, philosophers, intellectuals, artists and historians, among others. They are indeed the proper agents and immediate beneficiaries of dialogue and exchange, and they are undoubtedly cognizant and convinced of its merits. A cursory search on the Internet reveals a multitude of primarily non-governmental

organizations in practically every country that have a wealth of experience in one or another aspect of inter-civilizational dialogue and that aim to foster peace and understanding. Collective thinking and interactive reinforcement would pave the way towards common goals of peace, security, freedom, tolerance and justice.

As I indicated earlier, mutually beneficial interactions among civilizations have always existed and been carried through by visionary men and women despite all odds. The United Nations itself was built around this notion to bridge the divide between nations united under the Charter and to promote peace and understanding through an inclusive process of dialogue and interaction. The significance of our exercise today, in this Assembly, is to confirm at the political level the universal recognition and endorsement of the virtues, the wisdom and, indeed, the inescapable imperative of dialogue among civilizations for the growth of human life. Our aggregate support for the notion of dialogue among civilizations will help in rendering it all the more forceful a reality.

The proposal of President Khatami to designate the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations seeks to express the collective resolve of the international community to begin the new millennium with a fresh approach to global interactions and a determination to build a better tomorrow for future generations based on a new paradigm of understanding and mutual respect. His vision was shared by many other world leaders, including our Secretary-General, who have also spoken of the need for greater understanding among nations, cultures and civilizations. Judging from the statements made in this Hall, the timing for the adoption of the proposal is impeccable.

This proposal has also found support in other international forums. It may be recalled that the Tehran Declaration of the Eighth Islamic Summit Conference emphasized

> "the imperative of positive interaction, dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions; and [rejected] the theories of clash and conflict which breed mistrust and diminish the grounds for peaceful interaction among nations". *(A/53/72, annex II, p. 34)*

Furthermore, the Final Document of the twelfth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Durban, South Africa, announced that

> "the Heads of State or Government expressed their concern at attempts to suggest divisions between cultures and civilizations ... and expressed their resolve to facilitate and promote enhanced dialogue between cultures and civilizations at the turn of the millennium." *(chap. I, para. 43)*

The time has now come for the General Assembly, as the sole universal body encompassing representatives of nearly every nation on earth, to designate the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. It is thus a great honour and privilege to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/53/L.23/Rev.1, which seeks to take the first step in this regard and lay the foundation for institutionalizing, promoting and facilitating dialogue among civilizations. I do so on behalf of the sponsors of this draft resolution, namely, according to the list that I have, Afghanistan, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of Korea, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lesotho, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, the Sudan, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Yemen and my own country.

The draft resolution, in addition to designating the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations, reaffirms the purposes and principles of the Charter, recognizes the diverse civilizational achievements of mankind, emphasizes the importance of tolerance, and invites Governments, the United Nations system, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and other international and non-governmental organizations to initiate policies aimed at facilitating dialogue and exchange and to adopt appropriate programmes, such as public awareness campaigns, seminars and conferences to promote dialogue among civilizations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and other sponsors of this draft resolution are confident that all Member States have given this concept and the draft resolution due consideration and are in a position to lend their unanimous support, taking a resolute and historic first step towards the institutionalization of dialogue, providing

future generations with a sound and firm point of departure to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

With this, we are solemnly declaring that it is the hope and indeed the determination of the multitude of cultures and civilizations which today form the peoples of the United Nations that the third millennium will be one of dialogue and not of clash, one of articulation and not of violence.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): We live in a world that is both unique and diverse, and that is rich in its cultural and civilizational diversity. The globalization of what is at stake and of the challenges that face mankind as the century draws to a close makes it more vital than ever before to build a unified world: a world of dialogue, and not of confrontation.

Decades ago, the first President of independent Senegal, the poet and academician Léopold Sédar Senghor, put forward the concept of a "civilization of the universal" that would be a place for give and take, where every people, every nation, every country, every region, every culture would give to others the best of its own and in return receive from others the best of what they have to share. It would be a place where civilizations were open to influences from other civilizations. It would be crucible of enriching contributions from other civilizations, yielding a pan-human civilization. This notion of a civilization of the universal and of brotherhood among cultures, races and traditions is more timely than ever.

On the eve of the third millennium, the globalization of the economy, of culture and of thought and increasing interdependence among nations oblige us to form a new vision of international relations that excludes confrontation, racial hatred and xenophobia. The wealth of the world is its diversity. But its future strength remains subject to its ability to cultivate a spirit of peace, tolerance, dialogue and solidarity among its various components.

My delegation has joined in sponsoring draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1, on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, precisely because of this concept of relationships among the Earth's nations and individuals, and in conformity with our traditional openness and respect for the traditions and customs of others. Dialogue, with a patient determination to reach dynamic compromise, has always been a constant of Senegal's foreign policy.

The only solution for the international community is negotiation and the harmonization of concepts and ideas — in brief, dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions. The world needs a culture based on what we have in common and on pan-humanism. This need is all the more critical for the future development of the world because of the lessons we have learned from the history of society and of humanity. How many wars could have been avoided had a spirit of understanding, dialogue, tolerance and forgiveness had prevailed? That is true of past conflicts, just as it is true of the armed confrontations of the present day.

There is no intermediate option between the two alternatives: dialogue among civilizations on the one hand and confrontation among civilizations on the other. Dialogue among civilizations is possible and desirable, for it is neither possible nor desirable to impose uniformity on cultures and civilizations. The United Nations, where every day finds men and women from all cultures and civilizations side by side, remains the ideal framework for promoting, strengthening and consolidating the right to be different, and above all the culture of dialogue — and dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

By designating the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, our universal Organization would make a major contribution to our common struggle for peace, development and solidarity.

In conclusion, my delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran on its welcome initiative to bring this agenda item before the General Assembly for discussion.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I would like to start by thanking the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its initiative in requesting the inscription of this important item on dialogue among civilizations on the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, and for the preparation of the draft resolution on this issue which is before us today.

The importance of our discussion today is not only due to the fact that the subject matter is an extremely important one that was referred to by many leaders during the general debate of the fifty-third session, but also because its discussion in the General Assembly during this session, and at this time in particular, reflects a determined will to enter the new millennium with a new common approach based on common objectives and

common understandings that are not divided by intellectual, cultural and religious ideologies and beliefs. This determined will is based on the strong foundation of the United Nations Charter, which in Article 1, paragraph 3, states among the purposes of the United Nations,

> "To achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."

It is also based on article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says,

> "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Immediately after the end of the cold war in the late 1980s, some spoke of "the clash of civilizations". Debate about this theory continues. It is a debate on humanity and the course it will chart for itself — whether conflict and conflagration or coexistence and peace. We, the representatives of the international community here assembled in the United Nations, cannot and should not, at this historical juncture, ignore such a dangerous argument and destructive theory that runs counter to the common work and collective obligations we agreed upon for international life. We, the children of the twentieth century, must deal with this theory and respond to it clearly.

In our opinion, we must go into the next millennium fully confident that we are one community based on pluralism — intellectual, religious and cultural pluralism and diversity. We must reaffirm that this diversity does not prejudice the unity of the international community. Rather, it strengthens that unity, making the international community a dynamic whole based on healthy competition, positive coexistence and a common appreciation for the achievements of the many societies that constitute the international community. As Foreign Minister Amre Moussa stated in his statement before the General Assembly at this session,

> "Our community cannot be dependent on the achievements of one single society or tend to follow one single culture. The true path lies in positive interaction, complementarity and coexistence among civilizations. It does not lie in the creation of causes for conflict or in fanning the flames of confrontation and of clash between civilizations. If this is allowed to happen, it will create a dangerous hotbed of world tension and will ultimately result in a grave loss for one and all." (*A/53/PV.15, p. 15*)

Once again we are at a historical juncture where a strong message from our generation is indeed necessary. This is the time and the place for such a message. We want to see the rights of peoples and nations upheld without differences as to priorities and definitions. We want our common political action to be established without double standards. We want rational disarmament and an end to the arms race and to the development of weapons of mass destruction, without distinction or discrimination. We want genuine development which does not entrench poverty or ignore its causes. We want a clean environment, science which benefits all and technology whose achievements and applications are beneficial to all. We want a common position in the face of international terrorism. We want freedom and liberation for all peoples and a firm stand in the face of the forces of oppression, racism and occupation. We want a commitment to the rule of law and respect for the established norms and for the purposes and principles we consecrated in the United Nations Charter.

In order to achieve such results, dialogue among civilizations is essential to enhance the concepts of coexistence and tolerance and to reduce hatred and mistrust. It is our firm belief that if each civilization becomes aware of the specificities of other civilizations within a rational dialogue, this will open the door wide for better understanding and much more coexistence and, most of all, will contribute to maintaining international peace and security.

In entering such a dialogue, we have to emphasize that no civilization has supremacy over another and that dialogue should be based on the equality of civilizations, regardless of how long they have existed, how developed they are, how much they have achieved and how strong their beliefs and ideologies are. This is the cornerstone of the success of such a dialogue.

Egypt, which belongs to several civilizations — African, Arab, Islamic and contemporary — has always believed in dialogue, not only within civilizations but also, and more importantly, among peoples of different civilizations. For this purpose and in order to confirm our commitment to and enthusiasm for initiating such a dialogue, Egypt decided to co-sponsor the draft resolution on this agenda item, which calls for concerted international efforts by Governments, the United Nations

system and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations to plan and implement appropriate cultural, educational and social programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations.

We hope that Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations will spare no effort in advancing the celebration of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, a dialogue that would serve the whole international community.

Mr. Moushoutas (Cyprus). My delegation wishes to express its appreciation and commend the delegation of Iran for the inscription on the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly of the important item "Dialogue among civilizations". We consider the inscription timely and the idea visionary, because it gives us a fresh opportunity in this historic period for mankind to renew our resolve to promote, facilitate and enhance dialogue, which forms the cornerstone of the Charter of the United Nations.

We are on the threshold of a new millennium, visualizing a world that is even more interdependent and technologically oriented than at present and where every aspect of human interchange — political, economic and social — is globalized. A local crisis in a place far removed from our borders or shores unfailingly and immediately affects us all. We are part, it seems, of the same global village, where our actions or omissions and our deeds or misdeeds affect everyday life everywhere. Distances are disappearing, and close interaction is ever present and ever growing.

In such a world, promoting cooperation, tolerance and understanding through dialogue is not only a lofty ideal and a good policy; it is an imperative choice for survival. The world has experienced much destruction and human misery in the present millennium. Common sense dictates that the calamities which we have brought upon ourselves in the past — and some in the present — be avoided and that peace and cooperation replace confrontation and wars.

It is imperative, therefore, that we strengthen the bonds of the common destiny of mankind. The item under consideration aims at this lofty goal. The Charter of the United Nations considers dialogue as the *sine qua non* means for harmonizing human relations and resolving the differences among States which are bound to arise. The Charter therefore places dialogue on the highest peak of human endeavours aimed at the effective solution of international problems.

We therefore consider the initiative of the President of Iran, Mr. Mohammad Khatami, wise, visionary and, as we said earlier, timely. It is time to institutionalize dialogue among peoples of different cultures and civilizations if we are to serve the cause of peace and justice.

We need to be informed of the benefits of cultural pluralism and the mutual enrichment of civilizations. It is time also to address concerns over tendencies to portray specific religions and cultures as threats to peace and coexistence.

Our survival ultimately depends on our success in convincing the international community to peacefully settle differences and disputes through dialogue in accordance with the principles of the United Nations and to promote dialogue as the accepted mode of behaviour.

It is through dialogue that my Government is striving to reach a solution to the problem of Cyprus whereby the two communities — Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots — can live in peace and harmony, as they have done for centuries in the past.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we have co-sponsored draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1, introduced by Iran. It contains the necessary elements for institutionalizing dialogue among civilizations by organizing and implementing cultural, educational and social programmes by Governments and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, we fully support designating the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and we pray that the next millennium will indeed be one of peace.

Mr. Manz (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area — Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway — align themselves with this statement.

The countries of the European Union know from their own historical experience that societies and cultures

must not be seen as isolated entities, especially in an increasingly globalized world. For Europe, multi-ethnic and multicultural diversity has always been a reality. While creating an enormously rich heritage, it also generated conflicts, which often turned violent and resulted in disastrous wars. The countries that today form the EU have finally found their way to peace and stability through democracy, pluralism and human rights, which can only thrive in open and tolerant societies. We are therefore not only committed to preserving and further strengthening these fundamental elements of peace within the EU, but also to promoting international cooperation, democracy, the rule of law and human rights in our external relations.

In 1993, only a few years after the cold war ended, we first read about the "clash of civilizations", a new and rather pessimistic concept to describe and define the patterns of conflicts in a newly evolving, multipolar international system. At the end of this century, these conflicts seem to have grown in number and become crueller and more violent. This may explain the theory's inherent pessimism and also, I should add, its controversial reception.

The international community must not allow such theories to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. The history of our own continent has taught us bitter lessons about the devastating effects of political theories and ideologies that build on human fears and causing destruction by exploiting the human struggle for equality, dignity and identity. The European Union therefore rejects the application of the clash theory to international relations and political practice.

In this context, we thank Iran for its initiative which has been presented to us today. We strongly support dialogue among and within countries, cultures and religions. This dialogue — the credibility of which can, at national levels, be guaranteed only in conditions provided by democratic governance — already exists in a variety of forms and at all levels. But it has to be strengthened to reach its goal: to overcome errors and deficiencies of the past and to peacefully settle conflicts, remove their causes and limit tensions.

Dialogue at the national level can best be ensured in a vibrant and participatory society based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, religion and association and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and on representative and accountable government in which the aspirations of all sectors of society are fully reflected.

The EU sees the United Nations as an ideal place to advance the kind of dialogue that I just mentioned. The United Nations, as an Organization based on universal principles, has in fact done a great deal to establish a culture of dialogue in international relations in the aftermath of two catastrophic world wars. The United Nations Charter and those international legal norms of universal validity established as a result of a constant dialogue under the aegis of the United Nations provide the common ethical and legal grounds for the peaceful interaction we are aiming at. In this regard, may I just mention the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been complemented by a number of important conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the relevant declarations of the General Assembly, as well as a multitude of international conventions. The universality of human rights was again reconfirmed at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993.

Dialogue within this framework is a prerequisite for peace and stability in today's world. In fact, it guarantees and protects creative diversity and pluralism. We must do our utmost to avoid the fragmentation of international law, international policies and cooperation under regional or cultural pretexts. We also recognize our own responsibility in this matter.

In conclusion, we support the positive approach of the initiative that has been presented to us today. We should also like to express our appreciation for the constructive approach taken during consultations by the authors of the draft resolution. As a result of this approach, all the member States of the European Union are in a position to co-sponsor this draft resolution.

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): I would like to commend the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its initiative to include the new item entitled "Dialogue among civilizations" in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. The proposal calling for a dialogue among civilizations is both timely and relevant. It brings into focus an issue of great importance which should rightfully receive more attention from the international community beyond the realm of academic interest.

My delegation firmly believes that dialogue should form the basis of interaction between peoples, nations and civilizations. We have, just in this century, witnessed many wars among nations and within them, large-scale

massacres, ethnic cleansing and genocide, intolerance, prejudice and disputes arising from political, economic, social or religious differences. Yet, also in this century, we have experienced the tremendous benefits of civilizational achievements arising from unprecedented human creativity, ingenuity and resourcefulness. As we stand at the threshold of the new millennium, we continue to face the enormous challenge of preventing the recurrence of the numerous tragic events as well as expanding further the limits of human knowledge and endeavour in all fields. The international community should therefore work towards promoting a norm of interaction and relations between nations based on dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect so as to maintain peace and security and encourage development and social progress throughout the world.

Dialogue should be promoted as the accepted mode of interaction and the means to resolve differences. Dialogue among civilizations is necessary to facilitate and enhance cross-cultural understanding. Too often we have seen how the misunderstanding of and distortions about a nation, culture or individual have led to suspicion, mistrust, fear and prejudice, culminating in intolerance, dispute and even war. It is thus important for the international community to promote, encourage and facilitate dialogue and understanding among various cultures and civilizations, thereby promoting peace, tolerance and cooperation.

Samuel Huntington, in his article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations", published a few years ago, hypothesized that the clash of civilizations would dominate global politics. If this hypothesis is anything to go by, it certainly carries a very ominous prediction. It has created a healthy debate among leaders, scholars and diplomats, giving rise to various interpretations and conclusions. The international community must endeavour to prevent such a clash at all costs. Thus, the call for a dialogue among civilizations is indeed timely.

My delegation believes that instead of looking at a possible clash of civilizations, we should strive to create a fruitful crossroad of civilizations, taking into consideration that throughout human history interaction among civilizations has brought about positive and mutually beneficial results. We have much to learn from each other, and we must take the best that each has to offer the other. The advent of multimedia technologies, the speed and ease of travel and telecommunications and the lightning-paced dissemination of information have provided us with a greater opportunity for interaction between peoples. While on the one hand promoting better understanding, such interactions have, on the other, heightened civilizational consciousness and the awareness of differences between civilizations. Only through dialogue will we be able to foster mutual understanding, mutual appreciation and mutual regard among civilizations, nations, cultures and peoples.

Civilizations can be differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition, world views and religion. Civilizations are not static. They change with the passage of time. The values and customs of a society at a particular period may differ from the values of the same society at a different period. My delegation believes that because of this dynamic state of civilizations, dialogue is necessary. It is timely that the year 2001 be designated as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

My delegation would also like to underline the need to observe certain principles which would be indispensable if we should seek to use dialogue as the means to maintain peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations and peoples, enhance international cooperation and resolve international issues and problems. I would like to reiterate here the principles as enumerated by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, in his speech at the Second Asia-Pacific Dialogue in Kuala Lumpur on 8 January 1996.

First is the principle of the greatest welfare of human society and its members. When all is said and done, this is the most profound concern of the State, the society and religion. The second principle is that of mutual respect, due respect for each other's values, cultures, aspirations and abilities. These are no less meaningful or important merely because they are not our own. Third is the principle of equality — equality of nations, be they large or small, powerful or weak. The fourth principle is a commitment to peace and peaceful means, which must underpin efforts to build international and regional security and manage differences among States. Fifth, given our interdependence, is the principle of cooperation and mutual help. Unilateralism has become a less productive option, even for the more powerful. The sixth principle is that of integrity — integrity to abide by the very values, norms and principles which we profess and declare and expect others to live by.

The international community must make a concerted effort to make dialogue the accepted norm of interaction. The threat of conflicts and the tendencies to invoke new

rivalries and confrontations will always be present. However, efforts must be made to ensure that none of us resorts to force as a means to resolve our differences. We should seek recourse through dialogue. In this regard, the United Nations has a central and important role to play in the promotion of dialogue among civilizations and cultures. It is uniquely placed to bridge the gap between peoples, nations and civilizations. After all, the concept of dialogue is congruent with the basic purposes and principles of the United Nations.

As a nation, Malaysia may not be in a position to speak of civilization's glories of past millennia. However, we have benefited from the rich cultural heritage of civilizations of East and West. Malaysia is a multiracial, multicultural and multireligious society. We have managed to maintain peace and harmony among the various ethnic groups which now represent the confluence of different civilizational and cultural heritages in modern Malaysian society. We have always believed in and have continuously propagated dialogue, understanding and tolerance as a means of promoting cooperation and acceptance within the Malaysian society.

In sponsoring and expressing my delegation's full support for the draft resolution as contained in document A/53/L.23/Rev.1, which was initiated by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, my delegation hopes that it will have the unanimous support of the Assembly. We also hope that with the designation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, the international community will collectively contribute to the enhancement of understanding through constructive dialogue.

Mr. Sharma (India): We believe that the Iranian initiative to inscribe on the agenda of this session of the General Assembly an item on "Dialogue among civilizations" is important. We were glad to speak in its support in the General Committee and to co-sponsor the draft resolution contained in document A/53/L.23/Rev.1.

The United Nations was formed at the end of a war more shattering than any the world had previously endured, after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and after the death of millions. Across the street from this building, on the Ralph Bunche steps, are inscribed the stirring words from Isaiah:

> "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." *(The Holy Bible, Isaiah 2:4)*

The reality was less uplifting. Almost from its birth, the United Nations found itself drawn into a series of skirmishes, with battle-lines drawn on political issues between two competing blocs, not so much setting nation against nation, as value system against value system. It was a form of contention between two views of civilization.

On economic issues, there was a struggle between a capitalist model and the ideas of countries emerging from colonial rule, many of which were discovering for the first time the joys and responsibilities of nationhood and who had doubts cast upon their civilizational values and world views.

On social issues, a Western paradigm prevails. In international law, ancient systems of law and jurisprudence from Asia and Africa, for instance, have not been part of the evolution of thought.

Therefore, what we have had in the United Nations for far too long is — sporadically — a failure of understanding and appreciation, and — frequently — a tension between civilizations. Instead of Isaiah, we have had the words of Joel:

> "Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near ... Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong." *(The Holy Bible, Joel 3:9 and 10)*

Clearly, we need tolerance, an acceptance that what is strange or foreign to us or to our way of thinking is not necessarily threatening or uncivilized.

The word "barbaric", we should remember, comes from "barbarikos", the old Greek word for "foreigner". We must get rid of the unconscious prejudice that tends to equate what is foreign with what is barbaric. True civilizations, no matter how wrapped in self-belief, never accept that. In Aeschylus's *"The Persians"*, they acknowledge their antagonists as tragic and therefore, by definition, heroic. Unfortunately, though, as enemies between whom dialogue was not possible, throughout the play Greeks and Persians exchange not a word. This is what must change.

We often hear that we live in and are moving ever deeper into an information age. We are told that the world has become a global village. But this is only partially true. On the one hand, the world has shrunk. It is a paradox that the explorers who set out to expand the borders of the known world ended up by reducing them. No corner of the globe is truly inaccessible, but, excluding the developed world, much of it is still *terra incognita*. In this village, not everyone knows each other, or about each other. The poor ones know about the rich, but the latter know very little about the dispossessed.

The World Bank's Development Report this year has as its theme "Knowledge for Development". Although it addresses only a small segment of the problem, its analysis of the information needs of a globalized world is restricted only to what developing countries need to do to make themselves known and attractive to investors in the industrialized world. There is no analysis and no acknowledgment of the need for the developed world to learn about the cultures, backgrounds or special characteristics of the countries they invest in.

The recent crisis in South-East Asia, caused in part by the sudden speculative withdrawal of foreign investments, was perhaps an indicator of how a lack of empathy between civilizations makes it easy to treat other people as objects. The human crisis, the danger of social collapse and the possible crumbling of value systems that could follow from economic meltdown were of no consequence to the managers of hedge funds on other continents, partly because the citizens of alien cultures meant very little to them.

However, in a globalized economy, if information is money or power, the acquaintance must be mutual. Civilizations must learn about each other and learn to value each other. It is worrying, therefore, that the uniquely powerful tool of this information age, the Internet, which could be a web to bind us together, is filled instead with tawdry commerce and, unfortunately, with racial and cultural stereotypes. There is very little as yet in it to promote understanding among peoples. By definition, the Internet cannot be controlled, but, if there is enough interest, it can be used to promote understanding rather than hatred. What can we in the United Nations do here?

The wars of the future, we are told, will be wars over scarce resources: water, perhaps other vital raw materials. From this flows the need to husband our resources, to make development sustainable while not constraining growth in developing societies. We do not subscribe to the theory that conflict is inevitable. What would be unproductive would be an attempt to prescribe universal solutions based on the experience and preferences of a segment of the world's population.

And yet, on environmental issues, which all of us agree are crucial to the well-being of our planet, there is often a refusal to learn from the experience and the wisdom of civilizations that have been rooted in nature and have seen man and other forms of life as symbiotic, not as objects of spoliation. There is a drift to lay down codes of environmental conduct that, in effect, make the developing countries atone for the excesses of others. At its most extreme, this vicarious expiation takes the form of theories of "deep ecology", in which, in a distortion of the beliefs of ancient Eastern civilizations, the needs of nature, arbitrarily defined, take precedence over the needs of man. That, too, is something which would not be accepted. This world is a work as much of civilization as of nature; a dialogue between man and his environment, as between the civilizations that mould both, is needed to make sure that the balance of nature is preserved.

Several years ago, a former Secretary-General reminded us that the days of absolute sovereignty were over. Liberalization means a loss of control for national Governments; so too does integration into a regional or the global economy. In some parts of the developed world, national borders have become blurred; Governments have started to cede to supranational organizations powers over fiscal, foreign and defence policies. In the developing world, Governments and their peoples find themselves at the mercy of global forces almost impossible to comprehend, leave alone master. The familiar attributes of national identity are fading. Quite often, what men and women have left to define themselves is a sense of the culture in which they have been brought up. If this becomes combatively defensive, culture can become the enemy of civilization; a *kulturkampf*, after all, led to the most virulently destructive nationalism the world has seen in recent times. This is why, in a globalized world, the need for a dialogue among civilizations is more critical than it has ever been.

In addition, almost every country has significant immigrant populations; hardly any nation now is racially or culturally homogeneous. There is or should be an automatic cross-fertilization of cultures — the materially dominant culture of the West, beamed into our living rooms through satellite television, leavened by the foreign

blood it has taken in. In some countries, this has happened, but that is rare. More often than not, immigrants are alienated from the mainstream, economically and socially disadvantaged. In reaction, they try to recapture and preserve the cultures of their motherland in an inhospitable setting; they face a choice between imperfect assimilation or an assertive display of cultural distinctiveness, which casts its dark shadow in the return of racism and xenophobia to countries from which they had withdrawn for a while.

If we are not again to tread that bloody path, which reaped for us a terrible harvest in the past, it is essential that our cultures not draw us into ghettoes and that, instead, civilizations engage each other in dialogue and seek to understand each other. The persistence of a sense of difference is the seed of alienation of understanding. It can be overcome through striving to value our collective heritage.

We have heard enough about the clash of civilizations. It is time to discourse on harmony of civilizations and there is no more propitious place to do that than this, our common house, the United Nations, which we have to strive harder to transform into the "Nations United".

We conceive of all civilizations as the common heritage of mankind. If we dismantle the walls, they are common property. The civilizations we have inherited manifest a potential of humankind and enrich us all, because they speak to us all. They widen our vision, refine our sensibilities and enhance our potential as humans. The ancient wisdom of India pronounces that the world is a family. To internationalize this spirit is the true globalization of the next millennium. We understand the meaning of "unity in diversity" very well in India.

As nuclear weapons represent the apocalyptic threat which respects no civilization, it is the foremost task of humankind to abolish them from the face of the Earth. This would be the highest civilizational legacy we can bequeath to the countless unborn generations. Half a century ago, one of the fabricators of the atomic bomb, Robert Oppenheimer, awestruck by the furies he had helped release, could recount the experience only in the words of a scripture of a different civilization. It was, he said, quoting from the *Bhagavad Gita*, "as if the light of a thousand suns had blazed forth at once and the creator had turned destroyer". We need a more gentle light to be shed on us, a light of the highest reason, of concord, of human accomplishment and richness of spirit — in a word, of faith in the future and our ability to fashion it.

Writing in 1958, long before globalization became a catchword or forecasts had been made about either the death of history or a clash of civilizations, Hannah Arendt wrote, as prophetically as any of the ancients, in her book *The Human Condition*:

> "The decline of the European nation-state system; the economic and geographic shrinkage of the Earth, so that prosperity and depression tend to become worldwide phenomena; the transformation of mankind, which until our own time was an abstract notion or a guiding principle for humanists only, into a really existing entity whose members at the most distant points of the globe need less time to meet than the members of a nation needed a generation ago — these mark the beginnings of the last stage in this development. Just as the family and its property were replaced by class membership and national territory, so mankind now begins to replace nationally bound societies, and the Earth replaces the limited State territory. But whatever the future may bring, the process of world alienation, started by expropriation and characterized by an ever increasing progressing wealth, can only assume even more radical proportions if it is permitted to follow its own inherent law."

It is our challenge to disprove that dire prophecy.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to express its appreciation for the initiative of Mr. Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a friendly country, of inscribing the item "Dialogue among civilizations" on the agenda and of proclaiming the year 2001 as the year for dialogue among civilizations. This initiative deserves the attention of all States in order to create a world free of destructive war and a world based on peace, understanding and equality among all States and peoples. The initiative, which stems from the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, draws its importance from the broad support it received at the Tehran Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and at the twelfth summit meeting of the Non-Aligned Countries in Durban, South Africa.

When we speak of dialogue among civilizations, the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic speaks from the vantage point of thousands of years of civilization to which it is committed. We speak of lands that saw the birth of mankind and the burgeoning of the first

civilizations. We speak of a territory which is sacred, on which the prophets walked. The values which these prophets shaped constitute the basis of life for today's man. From that land, the messages of the holy religions and science, art and literature, were conveyed. The Arab civilization, to which I belong, is characterized by tolerance, giving and inspiration. The achievements of the Arab civilization were a principal source of the scientific and cultural progress of the contemporary world. We also wish to emphasize that Arab civilization also benefitted from the achievements and contributions of other civilizations. When we speak of the role of Arab civilization, we also reaffirm its openness and its respect for the heritage and values of other civilizations.

The initiative regarding dialogue among civilizations is an open invitation to the international community to open up future prospects for all peoples and States so that they may effectively and equally contribute to greater progress for our societies. The invitation has been extended in order to prevent obsolete concepts, such as colonialism, neocolonialism, racial discrimination, poverty and xenophobia, from widening the chasm between our States and societies. Dialogue among civilizations is a call to the international community to put an end to foreign occupation, with its injustice and violations of people's values their right to life, freedom, sovereignty and progress. Dialogue among civilizations also means dependency on mutual understanding instead of on nuclear weapons and other modern weapons aimed at imposing superiority by force.

The Syrian Arab Republic, under the leadership of Hafez Al-Assad, basing itself on what our forefathers began for us civilizationally, extends a hand to other civilizations and cultures in Africa, Asia, Europe and in the two Americas, so that together we may build tomorrow's society based on justice, equality and cooperation.

The draft resolution in document A/52/L.23, submitted to us today and which reaffirms in its broad context the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the diversity of civilizational achievements and the importance of positive interaction among civilizations, reflects our aspirations and the aspirations of the founders of the Organization. Our delegation hopes that the draft will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Fruchtbaum (Solomon Islands): The concept of a dialogue among civilizations is important and complex. In fact its complexity is a measure of its importance. Much has been published in recent years about the conflict between civilizations. Some have argued that the conflict is an inevitable consequence of profound differences between civilizations. The Solomon Islands delegation rejects the claim of inevitability and welcomes efforts to encourage continuous dialogues between peoples. We support draft resolution A/53/L.23, which designates the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and we thank the delegation of Iran for moving this proposal forward for our consideration.

The concept of a dialogue among civilizations, however, has its difficulties. For example, how are civilizations to be defined for the Year of Dialogue? We have no difficulty in recognizing the great civilizations in our time and in the history of humankind, but what recognition is to be given to those cultures and civilizations that comprise larger ones? What in fact is the relationship between culture and civilization? These are questions that anthropologists and historians have long studied.

Clearly, much thought must be given to how the proposed United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations will be structured. Who, for example, will be called to participate in the dialogue? Will the talking be done only by certain elites, to the exclusion of a wider representation of society? How is serious dialogue, rather than a series of unanswered monologues, to be fostered? How will sensitive questions, such as the role of religion or human rights in civilization, be addressed? These are the sorts of questions that we will have to consider. They cannot be left for resolution to the Secretariat or a specialized agency. If the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations is to be successful, perhaps even the beginning of a decade or more of dialogue that contributes to international understanding and cooperation, the planning must begin here and be open to us all.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX), of 10 October 1975, I now call on the observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Lamani (Organization of the Islamic Conference) (*interpretation from Arabic*): History bears witness to the fact that the Islamic civilization is one of the world's eternal and brilliant civilizations. The reason for its brilliance is the contribution of the Islamic nation to all of humanity in the spiritual, philosophical, scientific, literary, technical and other fields. The heritage of that nation has broad horizons, because is it

a human one that has extended over a long period of time. If the Islamic civilization was established on the basis of creed and belief, it was also established on the basis of creative contributions in the fields of thought, literature and science. Thanks to those pillars, the Islamic civilization has guaranteed its own flowering, has laid down foundations of life and has spread its reign of civility, dignity and respect.

Islamic civilization is the product of a society that has fostered interaction between the culture of its age, Greek sciences, and Persian wisdom. Furthermore, it has interacted with other peoples from Africa, Asia and Europe. Other civilizations have drawn upon Islamic civilization, taking turns in passing on the torch, thereby confirming the solidarity of humankind and the fact that humanity is basically across one time and place.

The inter-civilizational interaction across the span of history has made stability either attainable or unachievable. Although history has never been consistently positive, in most cases it has been alive and dynamic. We believe that throughout its long history, humanity has never faced a danger that has reached the proportions of the one we are witnessing today, one which threatens our very existence. It is true that all ages and all regions of the world have experienced wars. In fact, entire peoples may have been subjected to genocide, and continents and regions may have faced destruction because of civil, colonial and religious wars. But no conflict has ever before threatened the very survival of humanity, and no danger has ever before held over humanity the spectre of its total elimination. Yet, this is our situation today with the existence of arsenals of nuclear and other weapons that are capable of liquidating all vestiges of life on earth.

On the other hand, the uncontrollable diffusion of means of communication has not contributed to the achievement of greater understanding between peoples or of more solid bases for coexistence under a reign of peace. Thus it is our hope that at the threshold of the new millennium, humanity will pause to reflect upon its commitment to the establishment of a better tomorrow and to the achievement of a brighter future.

Therefore, we in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) consider that the initiative launched during the OIC Summit by President Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, proposing that 2001 be designated the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, deserves every respect, attention and pursuit. The Secretary-General of the OIC, Mr. Azeddine Laraki, has established a working group on the organization of the dialogue among contemporary civilizations. That group met in Jeddah from 23 to 25 June 1998 to prepare for an Islamic seminar on the subject. It is expected that the seminar will take place next year, in line with the present efforts to achieve success in the dialogue among all human civilizations.

In conclusion, we would like this dialogue to be a means for laying down solid foundations for a system based on peaceful coexistence and for guaranteeing a future of harmonious diversity and complementarity between our cultures, in a framework of ensuring dignity and justice for all.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I shall now call on the representative of Japan, who wishes to speak in explanation of position before action is taken on the draft resolution.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express support for draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1. It is the view of Japan that all States Members of the United Nations share the spirit of this draft resolution: that the international community must not resort to hostility and conflict in the face of an impasse, but rather should seek a solution through peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding. In the same spirit, Japan, as a nation of culture and civilization, is actively promoting cultural and intellectual exchange and dialogue in various fields. It is our sincere hope that the nurturing of friendly relations among States and the encouragement of international cooperation through a dialogue among civilizations will one day free the world from devastating conflicts and unnecessary bloodshed.

The significance of this draft resolution has been further increased by the incorporation of additional suggestions. It is important for us to recall that tolerance and respect for diversity as stressed by the draft resolution are at the same time conducive to universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Through dialogue and mutual understanding, the international community can reconfirm and strengthen its common values and goals, thereby enhancing the dignity of human beings.

Finally, Japan would like to express its gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for taking the initiative in introducing this very important issue to the General Assembly and for its considerable effort to produce this consensus draft.

The Acting President: Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution I should like to announce that the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1: Belarus, Benin, Finland, France, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1?

Draft resolution A/53/L.23/Rev.1 was adopted (resolution 53/22).

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to the representative of New Zealand in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Powles (New Zealand) New Zealand joins others in supporting this interesting initiative. We regard the whole question of a dialogue among civilizations as a huge and enormously important issue. The delegation of Iran and other sponsors of the resolution are to be commended for providing this moment for us to pause and reflect on the larger issues determining international relations.

We have not joined in sponsoring the resolution, however, because as a small Member of the Organization, we have inevitably not been closely involved in the discussions on the original draft resolution which have taken place.

We believe this initiative has the potential to have significant implications for the vexed question of North-South relations, tensions over which bedevil so much of what this Organization strives to do. New Zealand will therefore enthusiastically support any initiatives, including this one, involving a dialogue among civilizations which are likely to be effective in reducing North-South tensions and distrust.

The Acting President: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position after adoption.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 168?

It was so decided.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/53/3/Add.3, which covers the programme of work for the period from 10 November through 10 December 1998. I note that the lists of speakers for all items mentioned in document A/INF/53/3/Add.3 are now open.

I should like to inform representatives of changes to the programme of work as it is set out in document A/INF/53/3/Add.2. Consideration of agenda item 59, "Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters", has been moved from Tuesday, 10 November, to the afternoon of Thursday, 19 November.

Agenda item 44, on the situation in Central America, will be considered in the morning of Wednesday, 18 November, as the second item, instead of on Thursday, 19 November.

I should also like to point out the following: on Tuesday, 10 November, under agenda item 12, entitled, "Report of the Economic and Social Council", the General Assembly will consider a draft resolution on the international year of mountains, which is to be issued this Friday as document A/53/L.24; furthermore, on Wednesday, 18 November, in the afternoon, under agenda item 30, entitled "United Nations reform: measures and proposals", it is expected that the General Assembly will consider the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements circulated in document A/53/463; on Wednesday, 25 November, in the morning, the General Assembly will consider agenda item 58, entitled, "Strengthening of the United Nations system", together with agenda item 60, entitled "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly". Members will recall that those two items were also considered together at the fifty-second session. It is expected that the report of the Secretary-General on arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United

Nations system, issued as document A/53/170, will be considered at that meeting.

Furthermore, members are aware that there are still a few agenda items for which no date has yet been indicated. The dates for the consideration of those items will be announced in due course and sufficiently in advance. The Assembly will also be kept informed of any additions or changes to the programme of work.

Finally, representatives are reminded that additional time is needed for those draft resolutions involving changes in the work programme or additional expenditures, since they will require the preparation of a statement of programme budget implications by the Secretary-General and, furthermore, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee will need adequate time to review the programme budget implications of any draft resolutions before draft resolutions can be acted on by the Assembly.

In this connection, representatives submitting draft resolutions are kindly requested to do so sufficiently in advance of the dates fixed for consideration of items in order to give members adequate time to examine them.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.